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# FANCY WORK

## WOOD-CARVING FOR WOMEN.

**L**ATELY our schools of design have run strongly to some one branch. The course of instruction includes, no doubt, a liberal number of studies, but the tendency of the day toward specialties apparently invades the school, and the best work is to be found in some one department.

Thus, in New York, much wood engraving is done; in the St. Louis school the specialty has been porcelain decoration, and in Cincinnati the one thing which has been most talked of is the "Cincinnati wood-carving." This is due to the individual enthusiasm and energy of Mr. Benn Pitman, to whose national reputation as a phonographer was added years of practical interest in all matters pertaining to art, and especially to industrial art. About four years ago, Mr. Pitman fitted up, at his own expense, a room for a class in wood-carving, to which he gave free instruction. Very soon there were not less than seventy-five ladies at work, and the experiment was so palpable a hit that the wood-carving class was made a permanent department in the School of Design. During the first year there were begun, finished and taken in hand several hundred pieces of work, large and small, and at the close of the year a most creditable exhibition was made. The work shown at the Centennial was the result of the training of two years, and, in beauty of design and good mechanical execution, attracted universal praise. It was then, and is yet comparatively so new a thing for women to work with tools, that a description in detail of the carving-room on a working morning may be interesting.

The tools which were used during the first two years were small tools, chisels, gouges and stamps, exactly like professional carving tools, in miniature. Probably much of the first success of the women of the class was due to use of these tools, which were so short that they required merely a motion of the hand and wrist, to which women were already accustomed. Though there was no compulsion in the matter, a small wall-pocket was usually the first piece of work undertaken. That was alpha, and there was no perceptible omega. With the assurance born of success, girls sat down to carve a cabinet that they knew it would take them weeks to accomplish. The first lesson consists in simply sketching on a panel some simple design, either natural or conventional. This was outlined by the tool, and the design either molded slightly, and left as "concised work," or cut away in relief. The background was stamped, breaking the grain of the wood, which then more readily absorbed the oil, and formed a soft, rich background that was most effective. When finished, the panel was oiled, and was a piece of work which was a thing of beauty and a joy to the pupil until the sight of better work imbued her with a divine discontent. The one thing insisted on was faithfulness and truth of design, and so, no matter how crude the execution, the work had a certain artistic value. It meant something. The leaves and flowers were studied from the life. The pupil followed copy faithfully, and though you might miss the purple and gold of her fancies, they would certainly escape the possible humiliation of being mistaken for roses. Every possible article of household furniture fell under the chisel of the school of design girl. The exhibition room was crowded with tables, with triple gothic standard, and elaborately carved; mirror frames, picture frames, brackets, caskets, cabinets—standing and hanging, chairs, "prie-dieus," every article of use or ornament, and all decorated in appropriate designs. That is the beauty of this hand carving. If an article demands individual decoration, it may receive it, and designs need never be duplicated. Are we not all very tired of the stereotyped carved leaves of the furniture stores? And is it not worth something that the carved convolvuli on the panel at the head of a bedstead should be sleepy and shut, while those at the foot, which salute one's first morning glance, are wide open? It gratifies that fine sense of the eternal fitness of things which we are beginning to carry about with us, that poppies should be carved in the Spanish mahogany of the baby's crib, and water lilies float on the panels of the washstand. Many will remember the decoration of the cabinet organ at the Centennial, done by Miss Banks, of the School of Design, and the bedstead so elaborately carved by the Misses Johnson. The pupils have, for some time, used the regular professional carving tools, though

still retaining the smaller ones for work of delicacy. If this wood carving resulted simply in the making of pretty things to decorate the homes of women already rich in luxuries, it would, though desirable, hardly be a matter of any serious consideration. But it does much more than this. It is one of the vigorous beginnings of our industrial art. It is creating a market demand for itself, and unemployed women are glad to work to supply the demand. For the vast number of women who occupy the debatable land between housework and teaching, who will not do the one and who cannot do the other, this, or any other branch of artistic handwork is really the ideal work.

The best carving tools manufactured are the Addis tools, of English make. There are, of course, a large number of tools, but a well-selected assortment of thirteen gouges, chisels and stamps, will do any work which an amateur would be apt to undertake in wood-carving.

The first thing for the pupil to do is to learn to handle the tools and manage the grain of the wood. For a first lesson, then, take a block of inch black walnut, 10x6 inches, free from knots and cross grain, and dressed on both sides. Any other wood will of course answer the purpose, if black walnut is inaccessible, or, as it is in some localities, too expensive to be cut to pieces in first exercises. Fasten the block to your carving bench—if not a regularly made bench, it must be a solid table—with a hand-screw or a common carriage clamp, which can be bought at any hardware store. This clamp is smaller, more easily handled, and sufficient to hold firmly any but the largest pieces of work.

Clamp the block to the bench, then, with gouge No. 4 of the Addis tools, cut a concave chamber straight across the block, cutting with the grain. Take care to keep the tool in the same position, and aim to make a clean, straight, even cut. Most beginners spend an unnecessary amount of strength in trying to cut deep. That is useless. In these chambers a light cut is as good as a deep one, only let it be of uniform depth and width. Fill the block with these concave chambers, running parallel to each other and  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch apart. Then take off the edge of each of the four sides in a concave chamber. This will be more difficult. Now one side of your block is full. If the cutting is good and clean and satisfies you, consider that exercise finished. If not, repeat it on the other side of this block and on other blocks until you can carry the gouge with a firm, free sweep, just where you want it.

Take another block like the first. Rule a pencil line  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the edge all around. Cut a concave chamber straight across the block, exactly as before, but stop short at the pencil line. Set a chisel at the end of the chamber on the pencil line, cut straight down. Turn the block, and carry the gouge back, finishing up the other end of the chamber in the same way. This is a concave chamber cut short, and is an excellent bit of practice, as a beginner finds it much more difficult to stop a tool than to set it or help it going. The above exercise is a practical first lesson in wood-carving.

CALISTA HALSEY.

### SPATTER-WORK.

AMONG the many ways of utilizing the fern-leaf for decorative purposes none, we think, produces such beautiful results as spatter-work. To one who does not know the secret, it seems little short of a miracle that the fern forms, in all their grace, can be so literally transformed to such common-place objects as table-tops, work-boxes, and card-receivers. The first impression is that the work is done by photography, which seems the only way to account for the delicate gradations of shade which can be so skillfully contrived as to make the designs appear to stand out in bold relief from the background. Yet the process is quite simple. Before attempting to apply it to wood-work, the novice had better begin on Bristol board, which, lined with silk and bound with narrow ribbons, can be used for a variety of such objects as wall brackets, cigar-stands, portfolios, glove boxes, and handkerchief cases.

The pattern need not be confined to fern designs. Well pressed sprays of ivy, maiden's-hair, bits of strawberry-vine, and tiny leaves will furnish a variety of graceful patterns. In addition to the Bristol board there will be needed India-ink, a fine-toothed comb, a tooth-brush with long stiff bristles, a few drawing pins, a tack hammer, some small ordinary pins, and a drawing-board,

on which to fasten the work. The Bristol board having been well secured with drawing pins, place your leaves and ferns in position to form the pattern you have previously determined on, and be careful to pin down the leaves so firmly that when you begin to use the ink it will not spatter under them.

The ink should be rubbed from the cake into a small saucer containing a little water until the mixture is about the consistency of cream. Dip the tooth-brush into it and, holding it over the paper, rub it against the comb so as to spatter the ink; or you may dip the comb into the ink, if you please, and rub the brush against the comb. This is repeated until the background is the desired shade. Some parts will have to be darker than the others to give the idea of perspective; but in darkening these it must be borne in mind that the ink will appear blacker when dry.

When the ink is dry, take the pins out carefully and remove the leaves, the forms of which will now appear on the Bristol board as white on a gray background. The details of the design, such as veining the leaves, must be filled in with a camel-hair brush, and the general effect produced will depend a good deal on the skill shown in the shading, which must be done with delicacy and taste. When the work is quite dry, a hot iron is pressed on the wrong side of the Bristol board.

In applying spatter-work to wood, perfectly smooth white holly wood should be used, and burnt umber, which produces a beautiful brown, should be substituted for the India-ink. The artistic effect is greatly enhanced in results achieved by this kind of spatter-work by the judicious use of fine varnish, which changes the light parts of the wood to a pale yellow, making them harmonize beautifully with the rich brown of the background of the object.

### A CHEAP SUBSTITUTE FOR STAINED GLASS.

PAINTED glass fire-screens have been much used during the past winter, their opaque surface being usually adorned by a central medallion and pretty corner designs. The ruddy glare of the flames behind, lighting up all the colors with a brilliant glow, produces a beautiful effect. An ingenious and very cheap substitute for painted glass, not only for fire-screens, but for window blinds, which at this season of the year is more to the purpose, has been devised by Charles H. Chapin, the artist. It is in use at his studio at the corner of Broadway and Twenty-first street, and we do not doubt that he would be pleased to receive a visit from any one who wanted to copy the idea. He takes a yard or two of bleached muslin, of good quality, and stretches it on such a frame as is used for mosquito netting. First, a preparation of light colored varnish and turpentine, mixed in about equal parts, is applied with a varnish brush. This makes the material transparent. It is placed so that a current of air will pass through it, and then it will dry in about two hours. When it is dry, the design is traced with a lead pencil, it being transferred from a rough drawing on paper, by holding the copy against the window, so that the light passes through both paper and cloth, on the same principle as a child's drawing slate. The outline being filled in, he takes some ordinary tube color, thins it with drying-oil, and applies it, not with a brush, but with a cloth. But as the texture of the muslin would otherwise show through now, he takes a dry rag, without color, and rubs the other side of the cloth. After the broad tints are put in, the details are finished in oil color with a brush in the ordinary way. The colors, of course, cannot be made as brilliant as those generally used for stained glass. But for the purpose to which they are applied, they are the better for that; for the effect of their somberness is to give a pleasant subdued light to the apartment. Mr. Chapin has had to put two or three thicknesses of heavy paper behind the blinds he has made for his studio, so as to reduce the volume of light.

### FRET-SAWING.

THE illustration at the top of this page will give the amateur wood-worker an idea for a motto and frame, and perhaps a suggestion for other designs. Fret-sawing will receive especial attention in our next number.